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THE PRODUCTION OF VIDEO-TAPES FOR LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

- AN ACCOUNT OF EXPERIENCE AT BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

by

R. W. P. WYATT

In this paper I am concerned primarily with describing the experience that we have had at Brunel University Library in using video recordings in the student instruction programme for Library users. However, before describing this particular programme it is necessary to say a few words about Brunel University. In many ways our circumstances may differ from those of other institutions although the difference tends to be in degree rather than in kind. The students who come to this one time College of Advanced Technology are mainly engaged in scientific and technological studies although there is a rapidly growing school of Social Sciences and a department of Education. These students have chosen to pursue their studies in courses which put great emphasis on application, and eighteen months of the four year duration of their course is spent in industrial training. From these factors it is assumed, and no study has really been made to assess the validity of this assumption, that these students are less "bookish" in their approach than is the average undergraduate. The librarians therefore feel that making contact with these students is all the more important. Things are made more difficult by the fact that the University, which is a new one and still rather small, is nevertheless split between two sites, separated by some six miles. Consequently there are two libraries with stocks that overlap to some extent. The division has all the usual difficulties which arise when related subjects, such as physics and electronics, are separated. In both places the accommodation is temporary and not very conveniently arranged, and to make things even more difficult at the moment, although we hope that there will be a positive gain from this in time, the library is carrying out a complete reclassification and recataloguing of the older stock. It can be seen, therefore, that it is necessary to give the library users the maximum of assistance.

Library assistance and instruction has been developing steadily over the last few years. The usual printed guides to the library are produced and there are general and special guides to sources of information. Other publications explain the changes going on in the field of classification. At the more personal level introductory lectures have been given to first year students and seminars on the use of materials in special subject areas are given, normally, in the third year when undergraduates embark on research projects which are an essential part of their course. These seminars have been working well although it will be readily understood that to hold such meetings for roughly six students at a time is to make serious demands on the time of the small number of qualified librarians on the staff. Although we feel it is desirable for all the qualified librarians to take part in this activity, pressure of work makes this difficult and in practice only three are directly involved. It was however in the field of instruction for first year students that the problem seemed most urgent. As I have said, Brunel is a small university and the library staff is small. This question of ratio of qualified library staff to students is one that may cause difficulty in many other places especially in the very large universities which are to be found particularly

in the United States. The basic problem is one of enabling a small number of instructors to guide and help a large number of students. The size and lay-out of both the library buildings at Brunel make the normal library tour an impossibility, for which we are glad rather than otherwise for we have little faith in the value of these tours. Lectures held in ordinary classrooms or, in the case of larger intakes, in the lecture halls, are limited in usefulness largely because of the difficulty of demonstration, especially where the catalogues are concerned. Making arrangements to speak to small groups takes time and proves to create time-table problems, talking to large groups seems impersonal at the very least.

We, therefore, decided to turn to the Director of Television and Audio-Visual Services for assistance. The Television and Audio-Visual Services were a new addition to the University and when we first made contact they were themselves housed in temporary offices without either studios or equipment but while these necessary items were being obtained we were at least able to make our plans. During the summer vacation of 1968 the studios were completed and the library made its first use of video recordings in time for the freshers' meeting at the beginning of the Autumn term, 1968. The objectives of this recording were strictly limited, the time available was about ten minutes and it was to be just one item in a programme of talks and recordings introducing the newcomers to the services of the university. We set out to do no more than show them where the libraries were located, to impress upon them the value of using the library and to demonstrate that library staff are fairly normal human beings anxious to help.

Making this short recording was a useful introduction to the medium we intended to use at greater length. As already mentioned, planning for this longer recording had begun many months before it was possible to translate plans into action. The first task was to decide the approach and style. With the Director of Audio-Visual Services we saw some of the films that other educational libraries had made for the same purposes and we quickly came to the conclusion that a simple straightforward approach was likely to be most effective. Our aim was to impart as much information as could usefully be absorbed by an audience of students who had been at the university for about three weeks. We hoped to clarify the situation for those who had already begun to use the library and, by a friendly approach, to encourage those who had not. We decided to rely on one member of the library staff explaining the various aspects of the services likely to be required by this particular group, the talk to be illustrated by relevant visuals. Running time of about twenty minutes seemed to be sufficient to impart the essential information without padding and is within the period when maximum attention is likely to be paid. In using these types of visual aid the great danger always seems to be to put in a vast amount of information, more than one can expect an audience to absorb. The twenty minute period also meant that showings of the programme could be easily followed by a period of questions if this were required.

For technical and economic reasons it was decided to work in black and white; there seemed to be no very good reason for preferring colour although colour might make some of the objects shown, such as our own distinctive green backed publications, more easily recognisable. Of course it may be that as people become more accustomed to seeing colour television our black and white recording will, in a year or so, seem very old-fashioned.

The basic material for the script already existed in the lecture notes which have been used in previous years but the difference in medium, coupled with the fact that examples now had to be made of general interest and not tailor-made for students of one particular subject, meant that some changes were necessary. It also became clear that if the visuals were to be tied in with the script, the speaker would have to keep fairly close to it. He would not be able to come back to points he had missed out and the phrases used would have to act as cues to the Director for the display of particular visuals. The Director of course had no particular knowledge of libraries. All this resulted in a more careful thinking out of the sequence of points to be made than had existed in the past.

The visuals to be prepared, fell into five groups: photographs, photographic enlargements, captions (static and animated) and items to be recorded in the studio. First there were plans of the libraries and then photographs of essential parts such as the service points. These photographs were taken by the photographer attached to the television unit using a Pentax S.V. camera. Some items, such as certain library publications and some bound volumes which were used in the production caused some difficulty because of the sombreness of binding. Only one animated visual was used and this was produced to demonstrate the way in which our own services are backed up by other sources such as the National Lending Library for Science and Technology. One of the most important advantages in using video tape to be shown over closed circuit television is the fact that close-ups of catalogue cards can be given and the various parts explained, a great improvement over trying to show half a dozen students clustered round a card catalogue. The design men had to create enlarged catalogue cards on stiffened material. The variety of types of visuals assist greatly in commanding interest from the viewer. Credit titles and other lettering had to be prepared and introductory music selected.

Making the recording itself took one whole working day. The Director was insistent that it be made with a straight through run claiming any minor hesitations on the part of the speaker would merely give life to the recording. In this he is probably right although it obviously puts a strain on the speaker particularly when he has nearly finished and knows that a major verbal blunder might mean starting again at the very beginning. Editing is possible with video recordings and there are electronic devices to make this easier by switching from one machine to another. This, however, is not true editing and altogether it seems much simpler to make a perfect tape at one time. Two rehearsals ironed out all the visual problems and eliminated the more unacceptable of the speaker's faults. The first proper recording was ruined by an unfortunate transposition of words, but the second recording proved acceptable to the Director and the library staff who were invited to view it.

The television studio is equipped with four vidicon cameras, E.M.I. type 9B, three of which serve as conventional studio cameras whilst the fourth can be used in conjunction with a static piece of equipment or apparatus, for example a microscope. All four cameras were used for this recording. Also in the studio were two 23" monitors which enabled both the speaker and the crew working in the studio to view the picture which was actually being recorded at the time. An electronic viewfinder is fitted to each of three cameras enabling the camera man to compose his picture correctly. Two cameras have a choice of four lenses mounted on a rotatable turret, the third camera is fitted with a 10:1 zoom lens. The outputs from all the cameras are fed to picture monitors mounted in front of the production desk facing the Director and Control Room personnel thus displaying a picture from each camera. The Director, by selecting the required picture, can cause it to be switched to the transmission channel which is the picture seen on the two monitors in the studio. The speaker was provided with a neck type microphone the output of which is passed to the Control Room. The studio personnel

all used headsets giving them direct communication with the Director and the Control Room. The video tape recorder used was an Ampax 7003. In addition to the member of the library staff concerned, those involved on the day of recording were the Director, the chief engineer, two technicians and the vision mixer who is also secretary to the Service, all of whom were in the Control Room. In the studio were two camera men, the graphics designer acting as floor manager and the photographer acting as camera man.

The University has three medium sized lecture rooms with facilities necessary for projecting this type of video recording which means that nearly 200 people can see it simultaneously. In fact the audiences who have so far attended have been in one room only but even so numbers have approached the hundred mark. We are at present planning a new library building for the University and expect to have a room inside the library equipped to show this type of closed circuit television programme.

At present, showings are given after arrangements with the teaching department who release certain groups of students to enable them to attend. At first one of the qualified librarians was always present to answer any questions after the showing but we found that the questions were too few to warrant this expenditure of staff time so that now we have to rely upon students asking their questions inside the library after having seen the recording. The use of the teaching aid must justify itself on one of three grounds. Either it must effect some economy, or it must be more effective than traditional methods, or it must have some experimental value. As yet it is too early to make any real assessment of the value of this exercise at Brunel nor does it seem that the circumstances which exist at present at Brunel are such as to make the best use of this type of visual aid.

On the economy side it would be hard to argue that the making of the recording is very economical although it is cheaper than making a film as it avoids the need for separate filming with separate cameras and consequent editing and splicing. The requirements for the older type of instructional lecture are few: blackboard and chalk or, if a little more ambitious, a slide projector and a few slides. On the other hand making a recording needs a good deal of expensive equipment. This is, of course, used to record other lectures and events within the University. The older methods of instruction made considerable inroads on staff time, each talk taking about an hour, allowing for questions and, in addition, the lecturer took some time to prepare his notes. The script for the recording took longer to prepare and required discussions with the Director and the working out of suitable visuals. A fair amount of time was spent on the actual recording but this did not take up a great deal of library staff time. Equipment does exist which can make the large number of production staff unnecessary, the speaker directing himself and requiring only one technician, but the products of this self-directed system must, of course, be much less sophisticated and are severely limited in their usefulness. Whenever the recording is shown there is further expenditure of staff time since the presence of a technician is required. We can follow the practice of some of the teaching staff who do not attend the showing of their own lectures but deal with questions based on them at tutorials and I hope we shall soon have enough staff to make such a follow-up possible.

It is difficult at the best of times to judge the effectiveness of a teaching method and we cannot make any real comparison yet of the use of video tapes and closed circuit television with the older traditional talk method. The reaction of the audiences seems to have been good and some members of the University staff have made encouraging comments. Some advantages are obvious, for example the greater ease of demonstrating. Although the audience is larger than we would normally deal with at one time, each individual in it seems to be addressed personally by the man on the screen. The discipline of the medium is salutary;

the fact that what the lecturer says and does is being recorded seems to sharpen his awareness of his own technique and makes him take greater care with his mode of presentation. When he sees the playback of his recording he may well decide that his technique has need of improvement in which case the tape can be wiped clean and he can start again. Any improvement in presentation must be of some advantage to the student and it may also be that library instructors can learn something from the comments of the professional T.V. men. There seems to be a particular readiness to accept this form of instruction in preference to a traditional lecture. Perhaps this is because it is a novelty, perhaps because the screen has come to carry some special authority in our lives. Whatever the reason, we have noticed that members of the University staff have come to see the recording when they would not have considered coming into a lecture on the use of the library. Certainly if librarians are to carry out teaching activities in a teaching institution, they may be expected to be conversant with teaching aids and techniques.

Making a recording was of interest as an experiment, although there is an obvious limitation in an experiment which does not produce measured results. Perhaps an institution the size of Brunel is not the best place to try out this sort of work, and a university with a larger student body may have greater use for it. We have considered recording sample literature searches in particular subjects but here again the limited use in a small institution makes this more difficult to justify on economic grounds. A more generalised tape would probably fail to draw the viewer's attention to the special material he requires. Naturally the permanence of the information communicated is important and the rapidly changing library situation at Brunel means that our tape is bound to become out of date quickly. We hope, however, that it will be unnecessary to remake the recordings before we have a new building in which we might expect things to be rather more settled.

It might be useful if librarians concerned with instructing students in the use of bibliographical material were to consider making tapes of this type which could be shown in different universities but at present variations in the equipment available cause difficulties. Ours, for example, is on one inch tape which cannot be used on all machines. A company exists in London which offers a tape transferring service and there are ways of turning tapes into films. The types of equipment being marketed for this type of work are continually changing. In the past American products have tended to be of greatest importance but of more recent years the Japanese and other nations have also begun to produce equipment, and it is too early to be able to say categorically what type of equipment will eventually prove to be the best. Until this is possible, the problem of interchangeability of tapes will remain.

DISCUSSION (after demonstration of Brunel tape)

I. MARTIN: I thought the presentation on videotape was excellent but perhaps the speaker might be better able to hold the attention of the audience if the narrative was interrupted more frequently by the visual material and there was rather more of the latter.

R.W.P. WYATT: This is a good point and in our next production we may use a second speaker to get greater variety and stimulate interest.

C.C. PARKER: Does Mr. Wyatt think that presentations of this kind should contain an element of entertainment?

R.W.P. WYATT: This was discussed in detail with the studio producer and it was decided that a formal presentation would be best.